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SUBJECT: RUSSIA STIFLES UNSC STATEMENT ON GEORGIAN MISSILE
ATTACK, INVESTIGATIONS CONTINUE

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Russia blocked Security Council consensus on two U.S.-led efforts to have the Council issue a statement of concern over the August 6 crash without detonation of an air-launched missile in Georgia. When the U.S. recrafted the initial Presidential Statement (PRST) criticizing "the apparent attack on the sovereign territory of Georgia" as a less provocative and less formal press statement calling for all parties to cooperate in investigating the incident and expressing an intent to hold a Council meeting on the matter, Russian PermRep Churkin finally admitted that Russia would reject "anything on paper." At a follow-on press stakeout, Council President Congo briefly characterized the session, Churkin criticized Georgia's decision to destroy the missile's payload, and Ambassador Sanders called for a Council meeting at which Georgia could be heard on this apparent violation of its sovereignty. The Georgian DPR subsequently expressed to USUN support for a new OSCE investigation to be led by former Croatian Foreign Minister Zuzul and appeared resigned to not having a further Council meeting until OSCE issued a report. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Hedi Annabi, Assistant Secretary General at DPKO, briefed the Security Council on August 16 on his understanding of the events of August 6 involving the crash of an air-launched missile near the Georgian village of Tsitelubani. He began the briefing by noting that the

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information to be presented was gathered from public sources including the OSCE. The events in question occurred outside the region under UNOMIG's mandate, and therefore he would simply summarize the sequence of events leading to the briefing. In a letter to the Security Council president on August 7, the Georgians claimed that two Russian aircraft had violated Georgia airspace and launched a missile near Tsitelubani on August 6. The missile did not explode. Annabi

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said Georgia reported not having access to the SU-type aircraft evidently involved in the incident or to missiles of the type involved (Russian-designed Kh-58).

¶4. (SBU) Annabi discussed reports on the incident. A joint monitoring team (comprised of Georgian, Russian, and North Ossetian officials based in T'bilisi) joined OSCE officials in traveling immediately to the crash site and interviewed witnesses. Witnesses reported seeing an aircraft flying from NE to SW and then launching a rocket. Georgia recently announced that experts from Latvia, Lithuania, Sweden, and the United States had replied to a general Georgian invitation for interested parties to help investigate the incident and that the resultant International Group of Experts (IGE) report makes the following points: a single unidentified aircraft flew from Russian airspace into Georgia airspace and back, the missile launched was Russian-made,

several eyewitnesses saw the missile deployment, and experts could not verify statements regarding a possible second aircraft.

¶15. (SBU) Russian PermRep Vitali Churkin told the Council that Georgia had done "everything possible to make the incident mysterious." He said that it was strange how Georgia had denied for 14 hours that its airspace had been violated, that it took Georgia ten days to accept Russia's offer of technical cooperation, and that Georgia had destroyed the missile rather than study it. Churkin concluded that Georgia's actions have all been "propaganda tactics" directed against Russia rather than serious efforts at investigation. He said Russia had finally been allowed to send its experts, including the commanding officer of the Russian Air Force, to Georgia to assist the investigation.

¶16. (SBU) Ambassador Sanders commended Georgia's patience and transparency and supported Georgia's request for a Security Council meeting devoted to the matter. She introduced a PRST that welcomed ongoing international community efforts, called for cooperation with those efforts, and stated an intention to hold a Security Council meeting as soon as possible to consider the matter. She ended by declaring that addressing this issue in a timely manner is important for Security Council credibility and it is important that the Council make a statement.

¶17. (SBU) Churkin took exception to the U.S. statement, complaining particularly that it complimented Georgia's behavior and called the episode an "attack" on a sovereign state. He argued that study of the region's background demonstrates that Russia is not interested in increasing tension with Georgia. He repeated that Russian experts had only just arrived in T'bilisi and insisted that a PRST was therefore premature. Criticizing investigation efforts to date, he said "some investigators call themselves international, some call themselves independent, and one even seems to have used OSCE stationary without authorization."

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China agreed with Russia that the Security Council should be cautious in responding before a conclusion of the investigation by the two parties is reached.

¶18. (SBU) Ambassador Pierce from the UK reminded the Council that the missile episode risks raising tension in the region and may amount to a violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia. She expressed a desire to hear more from Russia about the joint investigation and its report deadline and scope. Pierce said that, although the Council should be seized of this issue and the UK supports the idea of a PRST or press statement, its timing could be negotiated.

¶19. (SBU) France said only that the Council should monitor developments while expressing interest and concern. Italy called for a new and definitive investigation to be headed by the OSCE.

¶10. (SBU) In reaction to member comments, the U.S. revamped the PRST as a press statement focused on an expression of concern and continued interest and calling for full cooperation by all parties with investigators only to have Churkin announce, as the revised text was being distributed, that Russia would reject "anything on paper."

¶11. (SBU) In comments to the press following the consultations, Council President Congo briefly said members had expressed concern over the incident and intended to keep monitoring developments, Churkin criticized Georgia's actions immediately following the incident -- destroying the missile, rejecting alleged Russian offers of cooperation, putting together a stacked investigation -- and Ambassador Sanders called for a Council meeting at which Georgia could be heard on this apparent violation of its sovereignty and the truth

could be revealed.

¶12. (SBU) On August 17, Georgian Deputy PermRep Irakli Chikovani contacted DepPolCouns to indicate that Georgia had been persuaded not ask for a UNSC meeting before the new OSCE investigation, to be chaired by former Croatian Foreign Minister Miomir Zuzul, issues its report.
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